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ABSTRACT

The biggest challenge for the director of the Campus Writing Center at Marietta College is to provide and deliver a "credit-free" tutor-training curriculum that voluntarily draws students out to constructively reflect on and refine their practice. The use of video as a means for tutors to conduct self-reflection, as well as a means for writing center directors to conduct tutor training, was quite popular in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, since the early 80s little has been written about the use of video in the writing center. This paper seeks to renew interest in the use of video for both tutor training and reflection. The paper discusses the goals for using video in the writing center, discusses excerpts from the video sessions, and demonstrates how video allows educators to better reflect on their practice. It also reflects on the paper's topic and discusses the author/educator's belief that the use of videos allowed the meeting of goals. Cites 9 works. (NKA)

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Using Digital Video for Tutor Reflection and Tutor Training.

By Tom Catalano

Paper presented at the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing/Midwest Writing Centers Association, University of Kansas, October 25-27, 2002.

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Sherry is a triple-major in English, Education, and French. Aside from the 18 credit-hours in which she enrolls every semester, Sherry also finds time to play in the college concert band, work as a resident assistant, volunteer some time to the college's activity board, and devote 5 hours each week in the classroom as a student teacher. Miranda is a double-major in English and History. In addition to the 18 credit-hours that she takes every semester, Miranda serves as the president of her sorority, chair of the student senate judicial board, treasurer of the pre-law club, a member of the forensics team, and a member or office holder of almost a half-dozen honor societies. Both of these individuals also devote around five hours each week tutoring in Marietta College's Campus Writing Center, and it's fair to say that the other eleven individuals who tutor in the writing center are equally as involved in the college experience. They occupy seats in student governance, volunteer their time in the community, and participate in Division III athletics. These students live the residential liberal arts college experience.

Perhaps my biggest ongoing challenge as director of the Campus Writing Center at Marietta College is to provide and deliver a "credit-free" tutor-training curriculum that voluntarily draws students out to constructively reflect on and refine their practice. Initially, we found time to read and discuss commonly anthologized writing center texts in small groups throughout the week. Many of the tutors displayed a strong interest in material that directly and immediately affected the way they viewed the tutorial. For example, tips and strategies for working with writers for whom English is a second language were read and discussed in earnest. Readings on writing center "ethics" also brought about vibrant discussion. However, I sensed strong resistance when I required readings or activities that were perceived as extraneous. Readings about the importance of "wait time" and the theory behind collaborative learning, for example, were received with less enthusiasm. Unfortunately, discussions inspired by the readings were rarely carried over from one week to the next.

In a moment of opportunity and intuition, I purchased a digital video camera for the writing center. So far, it has turned out to be one of the better investments that I have made towards promoting reflection, community, and professional development. When I initially purchased the camera through our college's Technology Improvement Grant, I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do. I had some goals in mind: increase the sense of "ownership" and community that tutors exhibit in the writing center, record tutorials (either real or "mock") for instructional purposes, and encourage tutors to engage in constructive self-reflection. Beyond these general goals, I had no real specific ideas.

When I conducted a literature review in the use of video in tutor-training curricula (I limited my review to the *Writing Center Journal* and *The Writing Lab Newsletter*), there was certainly a heavy emphasis toward the recording of mock-tutorials, especially in the late 1980s and very early 1990s. For example, Fran Zaniello, in a 1983 *Writing Lab Newsletter* article, "Using Video-Tapes to Train Writing Lab Tutors," describes how videos were used at Northern Kentucky University to supplement tutor-training instruction by pointing out "some of the things tutors should and should not do in the Lab" (2). Zaniello's staff scripted and recorded their own instructional tapes, and she claims that the production of the mock tutorials allowed tutors to see themselves "acting" as tutors. The safe environment afforded by the mock tutorials made it easier for tutors to observe and discuss their own strengths and weaknesses (3).

In another 1983 *Writing Lab Newsletter* article, "Homemade Instructional Videotapes: Easy, Fun, and Effective," Michael F. O'Hear advocates the use of recorded mock tutorials as a primary way to deliver a tutor-training curriculum. O'Hear recorded mock tutorials and later handed out transcripts of the tapes to his staff so that they could view the tutorial and follow the action. Occasionally the tutors would be instructed to pause the recording and fill out exercises that corresponded with the action on the tape:

"Many tapes are accompanied by handout scripts so that students may follow along with what's happening on the screen. Some are even accompanied by exercises in which the student performs during a break in the tape's instructional content or after the tape has concluded" (O'Hear 2).

Janice Neulib's, Maurice Sharton's, Julia Visor's, and Yvette Weber-Davis's 1990 *Writing Lab Newsletter* article, "Using Videotapes to Train Tutors," emphasizes the use of recorded mock tutorials for both instructional and reflective purposes. As part of a for-credit seminar at Illinois State University, tutors "work together on scripts and videotapes, basing the scripts on real tutoring situations" (Neulib et al 2). They then ask the group to write "a set of self-evaluation questions for the tutor to follow while viewing a private session" (Neulib et al 3).

Irene Lurkis Clarke's 1982 *Writing Lab Newsletter* article, "Hypothetical Dialogues and the Training of a Lab Staff," discusses the learning that takes place among tutors as they collaboratively produce and direct mock tutorials. In the 1982 *Writing Center Journal* incarnation of the article, "Dialogue in the Lab Conference: Script Writing and the Training of Tutors," Clarke argues that script writing among her staff forces the tutors to "choose those behaviors which best facilitate productive student-tutor interaction, determine the structure and sequence of instruction to be followed, [and] select which techniques should be learned" (23). In both articles, Clarke emphasizes the learning and dialogue among the tutors that takes place during the writing and recording of the mock tutorial, suggesting that tutors who engage in such activities feel a strong sense of community to the writing center.

Armed with a camera and a small literature review, I asked our tutors to submit manuscripts that covered a variety of topics. And, as I should have expected, this assignment was laden with challenges. One challenge I continued to face was the busy tutor schedule; it was difficult for the groups to find a common time to collaborate.

Another challenge I continued to face was the "relevancy" issue addressed earlier: the tutors simply did not buy into the concept of writing and recording mock tutorials, and saw no real gain or advantage. The manuscripts I received were very far from self-reflective. The scripted tutorials read like a bad soap opera, where a twist in the narrative is nothing more than a formulaic cliché. All situations addressed in the mock tutorials were remedied by many of the techniques that our tutors learned over the years: keeping the paper in front of the students, asking open-ended questions about content and structure, or helping students with an outline. Tutors scripted their response in a rather fossilized fashion, knowing ahead of time that a particular technique has already been stamped for approval (Clarke "Maintaining Chaos" 23).

Instead of throwing a $750.00 camera into my desk drawer, I went back through the literature. I came across Shelly Samuels' 1983 *Writing Lab Newsletter* article, "Using Videotapes for Tutor Training," which discusses the results of the use of videotapes for tutor training at Northeastern Illinois University. Samuels argues that "real" tapes are more effective than scripted tapes, largely because "the tape is of a real session, not a staged one, not a perfect one, but one of a 'tutor in progress'" (7). She claims that in reviewing the real tutorial, "the new tutor cannot feel programmed in his responses" (Samuels 7). Furthermore, Samuels notes that mock tutorials or scripted tapes were simply too time consuming to produce: "The time involved in such a project made it unacceptable for us" (Samuels 5).

Samuels suggests that any video "should really be presented in a three step process: previewing (preparation for the viewing), viewing, and post-viewing (analysis and evaluation)" (6). In other words, it's probably not a good idea to simply record a tutorial, plop the tape down on the tutor's desk, and expect him or her to really know how to respond. Samuels suggests that the video should also be accompanied by a questionnaire designed to "focus the viewer's attention on the discrete bits of information

that make up the totality of the image of the tutoring session" (6). Although she doesn't expressly use the term, Samuels' suggestion to break down the process of watching the video into a three-step approach, complete with questionnaire, is designed to encourage better self-reflection.

Currently I require all tutors in the Campus Writing Center to participate in one "real" taping and reflection session sometime during the academic semester. Essentially, I tape a live tutoring session of each tutor, download the video onto the computer, and then ask tutors to review their recording (often during their "down" time in the writing center). To accompany this activity, I developed handouts and guidelines for previewing, watching, and reflecting on the video (as suggested by Samuels). (See Attachments 1, 2, and 3)

This activity passes the "relevancy" test with the tutors, probably because it does not require any time commitment outside of a tutor's normal working hours. More importantly, this activity has energized the tutors' interest in reading and thinking about issues that affect the writing tutorial, and a sense of a discourse community is beginning to emerge.

The first session I recorded was between Josh, a new tutor in the writing center, and Alex, a new student from China. Alex filled out the consent form, and I photocopied his draft, thinking that it might be handy for Josh to look at later when he's viewing his video. I then turned on the camera, hit record, and left the room (the camera is small enough that some tutors actually forget it's there; I leave the room to ease the additional pressure on both the tutor and the client). Later, I downloaded the video on a computer in the writing center, and subsequently Josh watched his recorded tutoring session.

I sat next to Josh as he reviewed his recorded tutorial. Josh laughed, shifted around in his chair, and analyzed some of his comments. He stopped and played certain sections of the video over, and even froze a couple of frames to capture a hand

gesture. He covered his eyes in embarrassment during one particularly tutor-centered portion of the recording, when he left the room to double-check a word on Alex's translator with a copy of the *Old English Dictionary* down the hall in the English Department office. When Josh watched the video, he realized that Alex sat alone in the center for almost three minutes with no instruction on what to do. I asked Josh some of the questions from the worksheet, but mostly I just sat back as he continued to view the video, take notes, and periodically rewind and replay the recording.

A few of the other tutors that I recorded reacted much the same way, and during this time I began to see an emerging pattern; all of the tutors were picking up on non-verbal communication cues. Josh noticed that he talked too much, and that he leaned into the client as he was doing so. Molly noticed that she sat across from, rather than next to, a client. These topics grew directly from the tutors' interests, and as a staff we collectively began to form a discourse community around the role of non-verbal communication in the writing center tutorial.

Our readings and discussions during this time period were focused and energetic. We read articles about the importance of non-verbal communication and discussed the idea that over "eighty percent of message meaning is derived from nonverbal language" (Amigone 24). Non-verbal response, which might be as simple as the placement of the text or the possession of the writing implement, or as complex as reading and responding to body language, posture, and tone, plays a significant role in the development of a successful writing tutorial.

In doing another literature review, I discovered that some of the writing center directors that conducted tutor training on non-verbal communication were Janice Neulib, Maurice Scharton, Julia Visor, and Yvette Weber Davis. They claimed that "all center tutors learn on day one that nonverbal signals dictate the tone of initial contacts and may affect all future tutoring" (2). More common from writing center directors are comments

that recognize the relative importance of responding to non-verbal communication. Sharon Williams, for example, suggests, "A tutor's sensitivity to nonverbal cues *plays a part* [my emphasis] in determining the success or failure of a writing conference. If the tutor gives inappropriate verbal signals, or the tutor fails to respond to the writer's cues, the open, comfortable atmosphere needed for a successful writing conference may not develop" (6).

Of course, we're still in the initial stages of using this technology for tutor-training. For the moment, it has helped me to fulfill my goals of drawing on the tutors' interests, creating a "community" among tutors in the writing center, and encouraging more self-reflection. As our video collection builds, I can see other applications and developments of this technology. New tutors in the writing center will watch a few videos before they themselves are taped and recorded; a couple of my tutors want to use the tapes to conduct research on the difference in tutoring styles with ESL and non-ESL clients; and a few of the tutors are talking about creating an instructional CD-ROM. Most importantly, though, is the fact that they're talking, writing, thinking, and reflecting on their craft—all outside the context of a required course.

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